

**Public Works Committee**  
Minutes for August 5, 2008

Present: Rob Crowner (Chair), Guilford Mooring, Charlie Moran, Stephen Braun, Michael Cann, Don George, Vince O'Connor.

Guests: Rob Kusner, Mary Wentworth, Ruth [last name?] and Eduardo Suarez from the Commons Group. Also Phil Jackson, Sandra Knightly, and Beth Moonstone.

Administrative

The minutes of the June 3 meeting were approved with minor amendments that will be implemented prior to submission to the chair for posting on the town website.

The next Committee meeting is set for September 9.

Commons Group proposal

Mr. Suarez explains that the Commons Group is a citizens group looking at sustainable practices that can be adopted by the town. He says the group wants to open a dialog on issues such as improving and expanding bike lanes; adding sidewalks; and reducing speed limits. Goal is to increase the safety of pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists.

Ruth says she wants a safer place to live, says her street is a "super highway" and that she fears for her own safety.

A proposal from the group is circulated which calls for increasing the number of parking spaces for bicycles and setting a uniform town-wide speed limit of 25 miles per hour.

Mr. O'Connor suggests that increased bike spaces doesn't fall under the committee's purview and that this matter is more appropriate for the planning or zoning boards. He notes that there is a policy that bike lanes should be considered on any proposal to reconstruct streets...and notes that the PWC has consistently supported this policy.

Ms. Wentworth says that the Commons Group is simply looking for an indication from the PWC of general support for the goals of their proposal.

Mr. Moran says he supports the vision of sustainability, but says winter conditions requires more than bikes. He says he often doesn't feel safe in bike lanes because of the danger of open doors from parked cars. He also notes that pavement is often in bad shape and that roadways need to be repaired or improved before bike lanes can be created on those roads.

Mr. Kusner says that towns in New York State can set a town-wide speed limit of 30 mph and that some communities in NY are trying to lower that to 25 mph. NY tends to have more concentrated towns, he notes, so such a move might not be applicable to Amherst, but says this is still a precedent. He notes that the proposal to lower the speed limit would require action by the Massachusetts state legislator. He further notes that in Northampton there is an “active system” of pace cars where people intentionally drive slowly to help calm traffic.

Ms. Wentworth notes that speed has become a country-wide concern. NY has 6 towns that have petitioned their legislature to lower limit from 30 to 25. These proposals were passed in the NY state senate, but the assembly didn’t bring to floor for reason unrelated to merits of proposal.

Mr. Braun asks why the Commons group wants a blanket approach, rather than targeting only streets on which there is a known speeding problem.

Ms. Wentworth responds that excluding some roads from overall speed limit will make them more popular and dangerous.

Mr. Suarez says they want this issue to be addressed by the wider community, including schoolchildren, who are now frightened to bicycle in town.

Mr. O’Connor moves that the PWC recommend to the Select Board that the SB assess the need for bicycle parking at all public facilities and that the town take remedial action in instances where the parking is deemed inadequate.

**The motion is approved unanimously.**

Mr. O’Connor moves that the Public Works Committee suggest to the Zoning Board, the Planning board, and the building commissioner that proposals considered by these bodies include adequate, appropriate, bicycle parking.

**The motion is approved unanimously.**

Mr. O’Connor moves that the chair of the Public Works Committee recommend that the Select Board and Town manager communicate with the appropriate personnel at the U.S. Post Office to recommend that the bicycle parking at the University Drive Post office be made visible, adequate, and safe for public use.

**The motion is approved unanimously.**

Mr. Moran moves that the PWC support The Commons Group proposal to set a town-wide speed limit of 25 mph. on all town-owned streets.

**The motion is defeated with 1 vote in support, 3 opposed, 2 abstaining.**

#### Pelham Rd. Crosswalk

Resident Beth Moonstone speaks about the hazards of crossing Pelham Rd. in the vicinity of the Amethyst Brook conservation area. She and other local residents want a crosswalk there because it's "really treacherous" and is a crossing point for relatively large numbers of people.

Mr. Mooring notes that the Public Works Department cannot legally endorse creation of the crosswalk because, at present, the areas at either end of such a crosswalk are not in compliance with federal laws requiring accessibility for disabled persons (the Americans with Disabilities Act). The Select Board, however, *can* act in this regard, despite the ADA rules.

Mr. Moran moves that the PWC recommend that the Select Board approve the creation of a crosswalk on Pelham Rd. at the intersection of Ward St. to facilitate pedestrian traffic to and from the Amethyst Brook Conservation Area, with the understanding that the crosswalk will not at first be ADA compliant, but that steps be taken as quickly as possible to improve the crosswalk to achieve ADA compliance.

**The motion is approved unanimously.**

#### Cottage Street

Janet Salusberry, resident, says Cottage St. is a major cut-through, and busses and emergency vehicles use it heavily. Her main concern is safety. When cars park on both sides of road, vehicles have very limited access. She says a fire truck recently could barely get through. Says there have been previous efforts to limit parking to one side only, and that petitions have been circulating showing broad support for this measure.

Mr. Crowner notes that the committee had previously recommended to the Select Board that parking be limited to west side (i.e. no parking on east side).

Mr. Mooring says this issue was raised in 2005 and 2006, and always vanishes. He says that the Town Manager has suggested there needs to be a public meeting to gauge support. Mr. Mooring notes that the police and fire departments support one-side only parking on Cottage Street.

Mr. O'Connor moves that the Public Works Committee ask the Select Board to consider allowing parking on only one side of Cottage Street, that the Select Board schedule a

public hearing on this issue as soon as possible, and that the Select Board take action on this matter with all due haste.

**The motion is approved unanimously.**

Mr. Moran moves that the PWC resubmit to the Select Board the committee's prior recommendation and related correspondence regarding parking restrictions on streets in the vicinity of the high school, of which Cottage Street is a part.

**The motion is approved unanimously.**

#### Lincoln Avenue traffic calming

Mr. Jackson, resident of Lincoln Avenue, says concerns aired by previous discussants illustrate many of the concerns of Lincoln Ave. residents. He advocates a town-wide approach to traffic calming and the creation of an official town policy about traffic calming. He says there is an inadequate public record of discussions around traffic calming on Lincoln Ave. Results of the speed cushion experiment have not been revealed or shared, although it's been 10 months since the experiment was finished. He notes that residents advocate an experimental approach to solving this issue. Wants committee to direct the Select Board to create a traffic calming policy. He presents a packet of information supporting efforts to reduce speed and volume in the Precinct 10 area.

Mr. Mooring says a town traffic calming policy is near completion. He is personally drafting the policy and wants to get buy-in from citizens and all town departments. He says it will address a broad range of public safety issues and will not be solely related to matters under DPW jurisdiction.

A letter from the Town Manager was mailed to PWC members which reviews options that have been considered to deal with traffic volume and speed in the Precinct 10 area. The options include cutting off the northern ends of Lincoln and Sunset (opposed "with enthusiasm" by the Fire Chief); partial closures of Lincoln and Sunset; elimination of truck traffic (must be approved by Mass Highway Dept.); adding "no left turn" signs on Rt. 9 to prevent such turns onto Dana St., Blue Hills Ave., and Lincoln Ave. (he notes enforcement difficulties with this idea); reinstallation of speed cushions (but does not stipulate whether the cushions should be permanent or temporary, nor whether they should be full-width or split); and the creation of one-way loops (opposed by many residents).

Committee members expressed dismay and puzzlement at Mr. Schaffer's letter. Several members note that the committee has addressed these issues repeatedly in recent years, has recognized the need to reduce both volume and speed of vehicles in the area, and has

supported various efforts, including installation of speed cushions and/or barriers to divert traffic, to address the issue.

Mr. Moran notes that the PWC discussed these issues at its December 5, 2006 meeting and that Mr. Crowner sent a letter summarizing the committee's recommendations to the Town Manager shortly thereafter. A copy of that letter was not immediately available, so Mr. O'Connor requests that copies of the letter be distributed to committee meetings prior to the September meeting, at which time the matter will be taken up again and discussed at greater length.

Meeting adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Braun, Sec'y *pro tem*